DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 065 RC 019 005

AUTHOR Gerstein, Jaclyn S.
TITLE Family Adventure Programming for Troubled Adolescents.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Adventure Education; *At Risk Persons; Family Counseling; Family Problems; *Family Programs; Group Therapy; *Parent Child Relationship; Program Design
IDENTIFIERS *Family Therapy

ABSTRACT

The family adventure program merges traditional family therapy and adventure therapy to provide a more effective therapeutic process for the troubled adolescent. Family adventure programming is based on the assumption that the family has the skills and resources for positive change and growth. The stressful nature of adventure activities removes the facades and roles that hide dysfunctional behaviors and interactional patterns, and provides opportunities to practice alternative behaviors. Family adventure programming, with the advantages of both an intensive therapy and strength-promoting program, uses a "live-in" counseling process and multi-family group therapy to achieve program goals. These goals include open and honest parent-adolescent communication, mutual family acceptance of problems and concerns, identification of individual and family strengths, a solution-focused orientation, more flexible family roles, modified discipline procedures within the family, and reestablishment of parental roles. Following program orientation and the decision to participate, the family and therapist define problems, strengths, and goals, and develop written action plans. Techniques and strategies of the adventure component include breaking down barriers, extensive use of family initiatives, a focus on fun, emphasis on present behaviors, and identification of behavioral patterns, family strengths, and problem-solving methods. Follow-up techniques include written contracts between family members, progress meetings with the therapist, "family council" meetings, and use of adjunct programs. (SV)

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Family Adventure Programming for Troubled Adolescents

Jaclyn S. Gerstein, Ed.D.
Georgia College

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Running Head: FAMILY ADVENTURE PROGRAMMING

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"The goal of our program is to have a permanent impact on the self-concepts, behaviors and attitudes of troubled adolescents."

"The program intends to develop positive attitudes and behaviors of juvenile offenders toward school, themselves, their peers, adults and their community."

"The treatment program will promote individual personal growth and change and ultimately reduce recidivism, re-arrest and/or reinstitutionalization of the youth it serves."

"The philosophy of the program is to change negative values and behaviors into positive ones as well as to meet the emotional, physical, intellectual. social, and spiritual needs of adolescents referred to the program."

These statements represent the missions of adventure therapy programs designed for troubled adolescents. It is my belief that the only way that these missions can be acheived is through intensive and extensive family involvement. To benefit the participating youth, the youth's family needs to become involved in the treatment process. One form of family involvement is the family adventure program. This type of programming is a marriage between traditional family therapy and adventure therapy. The intention of this paper is to describe the rationale, purpose, goals, characteristics, and program features of family adventure programming for the troubled adolescent.

Rationale for Family Involvement

For the adolescent to change, his or her the primary social system, the family, must also change (Stanton and Todd, 1982). Stanton (1981) further describes what occurs when the therapeutic process is strictly directed towards the adolescent identified patient (IP):

> "One of the criticisms of traditional therapeutic communities is that their patients must be discharged back to the 'real world' and to the family. If these pretreatment influences remain unchanged, pressure is exerted on the patient to return to his/her old patterns. Including the family in treatment helps to counter this problem, since it amounts in many ways to bringing the real world into the (treatment setting)."

The treatment of the troubled adolescent separately from his/her family is often not as effective as treating the entire family in a situation where their relationships and interactions can be directly

observed and altered (Stanton, 1981). When the real world of the family is brought into the treatment setting, observations of family interactions allow the therapist to view the adolescent's problem behaviors within the context of the interpersonal relationships of the family (Davis, 1987; Heath & Ayers, 1988). The therapist can then work within the counseling setting to assist the family in identifying and using their resources to develop more functional interactional patterns (Stanton and Todd, 1982).

Philosophy of Family Adventure Programming

Now that a rationale for family involvement and therapy has been established, attention will be placed on examining the integration of family therapy with adventure therapy. Adventure-based counseling programs are obviously in the business of providing adventure therapy. When adventure therapy is combined with family therapy, the treatment of the adolescent becomes a family affair. The therapeutic interventions are designed not just for the adolescent but for the adolescent and his or her family. They all benefit directly from the adventure program.

Family adventure programming bases its philosophy around the assumption that the family has the skills and resources for positive personal change and growth. The program activities, along with the accompanying therapy, provide a powerful impetus for the utilization of personal resources to achieve the desired changes. Family members gain new perspectives on their own abilities and their relationships with the other family members.

Family adventure programming is an action-oriented approach to counseling. Because of the stressful nature of the adventure activities, the fronts, facades, and roles that families use to hide their "dysfunctional" behaviors are removed. Instead of just talking about problem areas, as does typically occur in "traditional" therapies, the family's behaviors and interactional patterns are demonstrated within the context of the activities. The program activities become metaphors for the problem areas in the family's daily life. The therapists and other family participants have the opportunity to observe the "dysfunctional" behaviors in action. The participants gain a better understanding of the consequences of their dysfunctional behavioral and interactional patterns. By providing the support, skills, and information to overcome the problem areas, attitudes of learned helplessness, poor self-image, mistrust, and lack of self-confidence are replaced with self-

confidence, self-efficacy, a trusting of others along with new and creative methods for solving the family's problems (Chase, 1985). The participants have the opportunity to practice new and alternative behaviors during the program activities. As a result of these changes, the family is better able to assist the adolescent in getting his or her needs met within the family system.

Characteristics of Family Adventure Programming

Several specific characteristics make family adventure programming a powerful and unique therapeutic tool. Family adventure programming is an intensive and strength promoting program that uses a live-in counseling process and multi-family group therapy to achieve program goals.

Intensive Therapy. Family adventure programming is designed to compresses the time typically spent in months of traditional therapy into a multi-day period. In a traditional therapeutic format, the family receives therapy for one hour a week. Twenty-five hours of therapy take twenty- five weeks. Families are asked to engage in half or full day sessions as adventure program participants. As such, they receive this amount of therapy time in two to four program days.

This multi-day format allows the family to have direct and intensive contact with each other, other families, and the therapist for an extensive period of time. Because of the nature of the adventure activities and the time spent together, family issues tend to emerge quicker and can be focused upon for longer periods of time than does usually occur in the traditional therapeutic hour.

Strength Promoting Program. Family members get to view one another in a strength promoting program. The adventure activities and other related interventions are designed to bring out the best and strongest resources of each family member. Family members are assisted in gaining positive perceptions of each other. They begin to perceive one another as capable and competent.

Advantages of Live-In Counseling. Family adventure programming has several similarities to live-in family counseling. Live-in family counseling has the advantage of seeing the family interact with one another in a setting more natural than in a therapist's office. Family adventure programming has a similar advantage. More information is gathered in a few hours of observing the family's interactions in these more natural environments than can be gathered during sessions in the office. The therapist obtains firsthand observations and assessments of family roles, communication patterns, problem-solving methods, and family interactions (Vass, Jacobs, and Slavek, 1984). Secondhand "talking about" the problem, as does typically occur in the therapist's

office, is avoided.

This model also lends itself to integrating the interventions within the family's natural interactions. The family's interactional processes are stopped at periodic intervals and the family members are asked to explore the consequences of their behaviors. The family begins to acknowledge destructive patterns by developing cues to interrupt these established response patterns. They explore new alternatives to their more rigid, less effective interactional processes (Vass, Jacobs, and Slavek, 1984).

Use of Multi-Family Groups. Family adventure programming tends to be most effective when implemented as a multi-family group program. A therapeutic adventure intervention is provided for 3 or 4 families per program. The benefits for using multi-family groups are numerous. First, the use of multi-family groups helps to reduce the defensiveness that is characteristic of families with a troubled adolescent (Stanton, 1981). By identifying commonalities among the families, family members discover that they are not unique with their problems, and their defensiveness will be reduced.

Second, the pressures typically placed on the counselor to produce change is diffused to a larger group of people (Stanton, 1981). A major responsibility of the participating families is to provide feedback and intervention strategies to the other participating families. In other words, the other families act as "adjunct therapists."

Finally, families that may have been socially isolated because of their dysfunctional behavior patterns can draw upon the strengths, objectivity, and role-modeling behaviors of a larger group of peers (Stanton, 1981). Through observing other family groups during the program experience, families are given the opportunity to come out of isolation and identify those positive roles, behaviors, and interactions that occur within the other families.

General Therapeutic Goals and Principles

The ultimate goal of family adventure programming is to assist the family in developing, establishing, and maintaining more functional behavioral and interactional patterns so that the family relationships become more mutually rewarding for each family member (Davis, 1987).

To achieve this goal, the family's energies are directed toward (a) the establishment of honest and open communication, (b) the identification of family strengths, (c) the development of a

positive current and future orientation, (d) the modification of family role assignments and discipline procedures, and (e) the curative powers of the family (Stanton and Todd, 1982).

The Development of Open and Honest Communication

It is important that honest communication lines are opened between the parents and the adolescent Identified Patient. The adolescents, who have come to the attention of the authorities, often state that their parents don't understand or listen to them (Jurich, Polson, Jurich, and Bates, 1985). The achievement of the family's goals is dependent upon the family members' ability to communicate needs, desires, concerns, and affection.

Accepting and Understanding the Other Family Members' Concerns

When family members articulate and recognize the mutuality of their problems, they often increase their acceptance of one another as individuals (Stanton, 1982). Each family member is encouraged to express his/her opinion on the issues and concerns that he or she would like to see addressed during the family adventure program (Davis, 1987). The therapist assists the family members in gaining an understanding of the perspectives of the other members. When each family member's concerns are identified and acknowledged, the family becomes free to focus on their strengths and the utilization of these strengths to solve current and future problems.

The Identification of Individual and Family Strength

Through identifying and building upon individual and family strengths, current functional behaviors are supported (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987). During the program, the therapist and the family members accent the strengths of each family member and the family unit. Areas of family competence are identified and highlighted (Stanton and Todd, 1982). By tapping into the strengths of the family members, the members will hopefully use these strengths to solve family-related problems (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987).

Establishing a Solution Focused Orientation

The family is assisted in shifting from a problem-centered, problem-focused perspective to one that emphasizes a present and future orientation (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987). A major emphasis of family adventure programming is to have the families develop a large spectrum of outcomes and solutions to problem situations so when, in the future, problems do develop, they will have a wide range of options available to them (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987). If the

families believe that they have the solutions and resources available to them to solve problems, future problems may not seem so overwhelming. They will have a positive expectation that they will be able to generate current and future solutions (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987). A solution-focused orientation will also encourage the family members to be more flexible in the execution of their family roles.

Developing More Flexible Family Roles

Family members of troubled adolescents need to develop more flexible behavioral repertoires so that they can respond more effectively to developmental needs of the family members (Stanton and Todd, 1982). It is important for the parents to become more flexible in allowing the attempts of the adolescent to test the new behaviors related to his/her developmental needs. Family members need learn to tolerate new and often unpredictable family situations that typically arise when a family member reaches adolescence (Davis, 1987). Parents have to establish the appropriate balance between "letting go" of the adolescent and disciplining the adolescent.

Modifying Discipline Procedures

Adolescents, who are classified as troubled, often come from families where their parent's discipline is inconsistent. Rules and standards are typically ill defined. Limits and boundaries around the adolescent's behavior are seldom held constant. Parental discipline tends to be either laissez faire, in which adolescents set their own rules with little or no input from parents, or authoritarian, in which parents expect unquestioning obedience to all regulations that are exclusively set by the parents (Jurich, Polson, Jurich, and Bates, 1985).

The most appropriate type of family discipline for the adolescent is based on democratic and consistent standards. Because of the developmental needs of adolescents, the parents and adolescent should establish a method for democratic discipline, in which they work jointly to establish behavioral rules and reasonable consequences for misbehavior.

Although they work together to establish the behavioral standards, it becomes the parents responsibility to insure that both the rules and consequences for breaking the rules are consistently implemented. This process helps the parents to reestablish a hierarchy in which they are "in charge". During all the program activities, especially as the follow-up component, the parents are aided in developing discipline procedures and reestablishing appropriate parental roles.

Reestablishing Parental Roles

Throughout the family adventure program, the parents are assisted in correcting, if indicated, the family hierarchical system. When the youth is living in the home, it is developmentally proper for the parents to be in charge (Stanton and Todd, 1982). In families in which the adolescent is acting out, the boundaries between the parental subsystem and the adolescent subsystem tend to be excessively permeable. The goal is to enhance the boundary around the youth through giving the parents tasks to create distance and boundaries between them and the adolescent (Fishman, Stanton and Roseman, 1982).

A Description of the Family Adventure Program Format

The rationale, philosophy, characteristics, and goals of family adventure programming have been discussed thus far. The practitioner, at this point, would probably say, "So what? Now, what?" This section is dedicated to the practitioner. It offers suggestions as to those preprogram, program, and follow-up activities and events that can be used to achieve the mission and goals of family adventure programming.

Preprogram Activities

Program Orientation and Selection of Family Participants. To address the issue of informed consent, every potential family candidate should receive a program orientation to determine the appropriateness of the program for them. The orientation addresses the program format, the goals of the program, possible risks, why the program is important to the family, and how the skills learned in the program can be pertinent to issues in their home environment. It is important that the family has a clear idea of exactly what the program will entail before they begin.

Following the program orientation, the therapist and the family members decide whether or not the program is appropriate for that family. The family needs to be motivated about their participation and should choose to participate voluntarily. The therapist also needs to believe that this type of intervention can have therapeutic benefits for that family.

Description of Problems, Concerns and Issues. After a decision has been made to participate in the program, the therapist interviews the family to define the presenting problems and develop written contracts. The therapist asks each family member to express his/her opinion on the issues and concerns that he/she would like to see addressed during the family adventure program (Davis,

1987). The description includes clear, concrete data about the problem that brought the family into therapy. Opinions and perspectives are gathered from each participating family member.

Written Action Plans. The therapist assists the family in setting small and achievable goals for the program. Treatment goals are established once the assessment data is gathered (Heath and Ayers, 1988). Minimal goals are set so that the family problems are reduced to concrete and manageable steps. The goals become more easily attained. It is important for the family to experience successes during family adventure program. (Heath and Ayers, 1988). When the families are successful with these smaller goals, they will be motivated to tackle the larger issues (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987).

Inventory of Family Interests, Goals, and Strengths. Along with obtaining information about the presenting problem, the therapist gathers information about the family's perceptions about their strengths, goals, and interests. Each family member is asked to describe the qualities of the family that he or she believes is beneficial to the family, those he or she would like the family to possess, and his or her perceptions about current family activities (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987).

Techniques and Strategies for the Adventure Component

Breaking Down Barriers. During the introductory sessions of the adventure program, the families are presented with a series of ice breakers and trust-building activities. These activities are designed to assist the participants in becoming more comfortable with the program and one another, relieving initial anxieties, establishing an atmosphere of group support, and building trust in self and the other family participants.

Extensive Use of Family Initiatives. Initiatives are contrived group games that provide participants with concrete experiences, and require communication, problem-solving, cooperation, and personal involvement. Group initiatives can and should be used as metaphors for daily living situations of the family groups and to raise issues for group discussions (Stich and Senior, 1984).

A Focus on Fun and Enjoyment. William Glasser of *Reality Therapy* fame believes that fun is a basic human need. Throughout the family adventure program, fun and enjoyable activities are intermixed with the more serious therapeutic interventions. This emphasis on fun and enjoyment helps family increase their enjoyment in being with one another and the probability that the family will engage in recreational pursuits as a family.

Emphasis on Present Behaviors. During the adventure experience, the observable behaviors of the family are emphasized. Explanations of inferential, linear causations are avoided (Heath and Ayers, 1988). Discussions revolve around changing present behaviors rather than discussing past ones (Davis, 1987). The family focuses upon what can be done in the present to create a more satisfying family environment.

Identification of Methods for Solving Problems. It is often the methods that the family utilizes in their attempts to solve problems that maintain or perpetuate the problem behaviors (Heath and Ayers, 1988). Because the adventure activities present the families with a variety of problems, problem-solving methods can be directly observed and identified. The methods that families use to solve problems provide the direction for the therapeutic planning and intervention (Heath and Ayers, 1988).

Identification and Intervention of Behavioral Patterns. During the execution of the adventure activities, the family's repetitive and non-working behavioral and communication patterns can be identified and thus, interrupted (Stanton and Todd, 1982). The family analyzes their non-working attempts to solve problems (Heath and Ayers, 1988). With the assistance of the larger group of therapists and families, each family discusses and develops new methods of communications and new alternatives to solve problems.

Identification of Family Strengths. The feedback given to the families is also directed towards the positive aspects of each family. The family and family observers (other families and counselors) are encouraged to identify the strengths of the family unit and individual family members in the areas of effective communication patterns, interactional styles, and problem-solving techniques.

Follow-Up Techniques

Follow-Up Contracts. As part of the contract, the parents and the adolescent work together to set clearly defined behavioral limits (Eastwood, Sweeney, Piercy, 1987). In other words, the family, both parents and offspring, work together to negotiate "house rules" along with the consequences if the rules are broken (Stanton and Todd, 1982). Fatis and Konewko (1983) describe the follow-up contract as follows:

"Therapeutically, the written contract is a systematic procedure for establishing agreements

for behavioral change by reversing the process of aversive control. By setting rules, written contracts explicitly describe agreements and specify means and consequences of fulfilling the contract. The written contracts delineate desired behaviors to be rewarded and encourage family members to assign value to specific behaviors and consequences."

The parents need to collaborate as a parental unit in implementing the rules and the consequences for the adolescent's misbehavior. They show him/her more respect while challenging him/her to behave in a more responsible manner (Stanton and Todd, 1982).

In the second part of the contract, the family formulates a plan to deal with future problems . . . problems similar to the ones that brought the family into therapy (Eastwood, Sweeney, and Piercy, 1987). The contract describes those steps that the family will take to solve future problems. The first steps are based on techniques to prevent future incidents. In the steps that follow, the family specifies those actions they will take if a problem does occur.

Progress Meetings: The family meets with the therapist and the other families two weeks to one month following the adventure program to discuss progress on the contract agreements. The contract agreements are modified or extended depending on the progress and performance of the family members. If no change is reported, the family explores the specific tasks of the contract agreement that can be modified or abandoned for a new one (Heath and Ayers, 1988). Continued "check-up" visits occur every 4-6 weeks to monitor the progress of the change process.

The Family Council: The family is encouraged to implement the Family Council. The Family Council is a weekly meeting where the family unit discusses problems, family leisure time pursuits, and family chores. Each family member is given the opportunity to be heard and all family members have an equal vote on family matters (Croakes, 1983). The Family Council is designed to build family cohesivenss. It is not a time for complaining, fighting, and working out discipline procedures.

Use of Adjunct Programs: Adjunct programs are recommended to the family groups based on their needs and problems. Problems within the family may require some additional treatment that family adventure programming cannot provide. Family problems may be severe enough to indicate some longer term family therapy. If this is the case, the family is referred to an agency which would be able to provide this type of treatment. Self-help support groups such as

Alcoholics Anonymous, ala-Teen, Alanon, or Family's Anonymous can also be recommended to assist the family with some needed external supports.

Conclusion

Adventure-based counseling programs need to provide their adolescent clients with the services that have the most potential for everlasting change. Families should be included as a component of the treatment program. When properly designed and implemented, family adventure programing becomes a viable and effective means of treating the adolescent and increasing the probability that the adventure program will meet its moral and ethical obligations to the participating adolescents and their families.

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Author's Biography

Jackie Gerstein began working with troubled adolescents in adventure therapy programs in 1978. After ten years in "the field", she had two earth shattering realizations. First, she found it frightening that she was counseling these adolescents without any formalized or specialized training in counseling. To address this concern, she went back to graduate school and finished her Doctorate in Counseling. Second, she realized that family involvement is imperative for the treatment of troubled adolescents. Currently, she is working on her American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Associate Status, and hopes to make family adventure programming a "household word".